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ARTICLE

Culture, language, pedagogy: The place of culture in language teacher education

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Abstract

The principles of much language teacher education – and especially programmes for international students who intend to return to their home countries to teach English – are grounded in a relatively homogenous set of 'western' cultural values, despite students coming from a wide range of different cultural backgrounds. This paper addresses some of the issues surrounding the role of culture in language teacher education and discusses the variety of ways in which cultural phenomena are defined and recognized on such programmes. It argues that language teacher education should acknowledge difference on the part of both language teacher educators and participants on language education programmes. For above all, language teachers need to develop the competence to function in a range of cultural contexts and to be critically aware of the relationship between culture, context and pedagogic practice.

Keywords: Cultural competence, language teaching, language learning, teacher education, TESOL, EFL, MFL

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Introduction

It has long been recognized that language is a realization of cultural reality (Halliday, 1978, p. 242; Kramsch, 1998, p. 3). It is important for both language learners and their teachers to be aware of this interrelation: "in order for language learners to apply language skills fruitfully and effectively a knowledge of the cultural environment is essential" (Mughan, 1998, p.41). Language teachers must also "make their students aware of the proper linguistic performance in diverse types of intercultural settings" (Dunnett et al., 1986, p.158).

In the UK, the links between language and culture are realized differently in the pedagogic discourses of 'modern language' teaching (i.e. in the UK, the teaching of mainly French and German) and English language teaching. Due to the importance of the year abroad experience for the prospective modern language teacher, the relationship between language and culture has taken a central place in their training and education. However, the discourse of English language teaching is derived largely from the discipline of applied linguistics. While this has lead to a powerful focus on developing functional classroom methodologies such as communicative language teaching (Breen and Candlin, 1980; Richards and Rodgers 2001) and task-based learning (Ellis, 2003) on the basis of theories of language, the relationship between language and culture has been left relatively implicit within the education of teachers in this area.

> Many language teacher education programs continue to operate under the assumption that they must provide teachers with a codified body of knowledge about language, language learning and teaching; expose them to a range of teaching practices or methodologies; and provide a field experience in which they are expected to apply their theoretical knowledge in actual classroom settings (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 402).

This description of language teacher education programmes makes no explicit mention of culture. This may be due to the high level of generality of the description, but more likely it is because the implications of the relationship between language and culture for language teacher education have not been fully worked through.

The aim of this paper is to investigate this relationship by looking at the role of culture in the components of language teacher education programmes. While our discussion is mainly contextualized within the pedagogy of teaching English as a foreign or second language, these issues are also important in the teaching of French and German in the UK, and for the teaching of less culturally hegemonic languages worldwide.

In what follows the components of language teacher education are grouped according to whether they are predominantly centred on language or education. The language-centred components often include courses on language description such as syntax, or phonetics and phonology; while the education-centred components often include courses on theories of language learning and teaching, such as second language acquisition. However, it is not always possible to separate language teacher education courses as a whole conveniently into categories. For example, methodology courses and field experience involve both language (the language to which learners are exposed) and education (how exposure enables learners to develop their language competence). A discussion of what is meant by the term 'culture' on language teacher education programmes follows.

Language and culture

Within the discourse of language education, culture has been taken as referring to many different things (Killick, 1999, p.4). It has been taken as meaning high culture, the literature, art and music of a particular society. Alternatively it may be taken as referring to some highly visible aspects of a particular society. While teaching on undergraduate courses in English language at a Scottish university, the authors realized that their international students had been exposed to representations of the national culture as necessarily involving such stereotypical and anachronistic behaviours as eating haggis and wearing tartan. However, the conceptualization of culture which is often regarded as being most relevant to foreign language learners is awareness of social convention.

A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe, to operate in a manner acceptable to

its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves (Goodenough in Connor, 1996,

p.101).

This means that the aim of language education has to be to develop competence in both language and culture. If the language competence of the learners is the focus, this means that, when the target language is used in the classroom, it should reflect the culture of the target language. If the cultural competence of the learners is the focus, it is necessary to ensure that what happens in the language classroom takes account of the cultural, as well as the linguistic, gap between where the learners are and their desired areas and level of competence.

However, for English as for any language, even the concept of 'target language' is deeply problematic. English is used by people from many different nations, and within different nations it is possible to find a wide variety of cultures. In some restricted, functional, situations the choice of language and culture may be relatively straightforward. For example, those who are learning English for specific purposes (ESP), such as law or medicine, may have narrowly defined linguistic and, hence, cultural aims. Therefore, it is possible to explore the linguistic and cultural conventions of a particular 'discourse community' (Swales, 1990) without much problem. However, the huge majority of language learners is probably made up of those who study the English language without any special aim, for example those who are studying English as part of a required secondary school programme. Here it is more difficult to see how a selection of language and culture can be made for the language classroom. Typically, the default choice of cultures is British, Australian or North American but such a choice is open to question (Byram et al, 1994, p. 49). Given that a large number, if not the majority, of interactions in English are between 'non-native' speakers, perhaps it is necessary to address the role of cultures associated with English as a second or foreign language in, say, West Africa, South East Asia or parts of Europe, or with the notion of English as an International Language.

The processes whereby learners develop cultural competence have also not gained the same general recognition in language teacher education when compared with the range of theories which describe the process of acquiring language competence. Theories of second language acquisition such as the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1981; Mitchell & Miles, 2004, p. 44 ff.) or the Zone of Proximal Development (Mitchell & Miles, 2004, p. 195 ff Vygotsky, 1978) have become common currency on language teacher education programmes, but theories of developing cultural competence do not achieve such a high profile.

Implications for language teacher education

The relationship between language and culture in language teacher education will now be taken further by examining some of the implications for courses on language description and the criteria for the selection of language samples in methodology and field experience.

Language description

The first way that cultural awareness can be incorporated in language teacher education is through the model which is adopted to describe the target language. If we accept that language is a realization of culture, then it is necessary to provide language education students with a description of language which incorporates this principle. This means using a model of language which reflects what words do in their social context. Martin and Rothery (1986), for example, develop M.A.K. Halliday's model of systemic-functional linguistics in a way that presents genre as directly reflecting culture. For them, genre 'refers to the staged purposeful social processes through which a culture is realized in language' (1986, p. 242).

Language teacher education programmes should possibly include some aspects of systemic-functional language description or something similar, both because of the recognition of the way that culture reflects and is reflected in language and also because the unit of description of the text in such descriptions facilitates an examination of cultural variation. Cultural variation can be examined in two other areas of linguistic analysis: conversational

analysis and contrastive rhetoric. By analyzing the linguistic realization of conversational strategies, student teachers can become aware that spoken interactions happen in different ways in different cultures:

> ...when someone says yes it often doesn't mean yes at all, and when people smile it doesn't always mean they are pleased. When the American visitor makes a helpful gesture he may be rebuffed; when he tries to be friendly nothing happens (Brown, 1994, p.129).

Contrastive rhetoric can also be useful in order for student teachers to take into account the problems advanced language learners encounter when they compose a unit of L2 discourse. This might be well formed at a syntactic and semantic level, but is still framed using the rhetorical conventions of the L1: "…student teachers need to know that students use patterns of language and stylistic conventions that they have learned in their native languages and cultures" (Connor, 1996, p.5).

In this way, language teacher education courses can provide students with the skills they need to understand the links between particular chunks of language and particular aspects of culture. However, there are some potential problems with this approach. Firstly, systemic-functional approaches are almost entirely syntactic and they cover choices about meaning at a very general level. Although Halliday has described lexis as the most delicate form of grammar (1978, p.3) there is not yet an adequate description of how culture, or 'social context' in Halliday's term, is reflected in lexis and lexical variation. Secondly, the need to enable student teachers to acquire the analytical knowledge and skills needed for a systemic-functional approach often squeezes out work on cultural and linguistic variation. This can lead towards the unreflective acceptance of an idealized standard form of the target language. Thirdly, the forms of grammatical description in most language textbooks tend not to use the terminology and concepts of systemic-functional linguistics. The use of two or more kinds of grammar descriptions may not facilitate the transition of student teachers from the education programme to the classroom.

Language sample selection

The second area through which cultural awareness can be incorporated into language teacher education is by exploring the criteria for the adoption of target language samples in the classroom. This of necessity problematizes the ideas of both target culture and of the development of cultural competence. Thus, Bex berates 'the foisting of hegemonic Anglo-American culture on the world by the EFL industry' (1994, p.62); and Zaid argues that learners should be 'allowed to nativize the English language to fit and fulfill their own roles' (1999, p.120). These arguments point to the need for language teachers to be able to ensure that a particular language sample or language activity is appropriate for a particular group of learners as well as to a recognition of the possibilities inherent in L2 realizations of the L1 culture. If the inter-relatedness of language and culture is taken on board, this implies that teachers need the same skills in relation to level and appropriacy with regard to culture as they have with regard to language; and teacher educators need to consider how they can help student teachers to acquire these skills (Guest 2002).

It is probably not possible to give all English language teachers a knowledge of the cultures of both the language they are going to teach and of the language their future students speak. However, it should be feasible to provide them with the skills to analyze both the cultures of the language they are teaching and the cultures of the learners they work with. This might entail the inclusion of some kind of ethnographic or perhaps critical discourse unit in the language teacher education programme (Freeman and Johnson, 1998, p. 412). One possible approach to this may be to encourage student teachers to engage in ethnographic or critical discourse investigations of the cultural environment in which they are studying, irrespective of whether this is an environment where people speak the target language.

Culture and pedagogy

It was mentioned above that cultures are not necessarily linked to nations. Many writers have argued that there are a range of educational cultures and that these, however defined, have different approaches to classroom procedures and methodologies. It has been suggested, therefore, that certain teaching methodologies may not be appropriate within certain educational cultures (Bax, 2003a; Hu, 2005; Liu, 1998; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Zaid, 1999). Much of this debate seems to relate to the response of what are sometimes termed Confucian cultures to communicative language teaching methodologies (Hofstede, 1991; Jin & Cortazzi, 1996, Scollon 1999).

Conventionally, Confucian educational cultures are regarded as being characterized by the foregrounding of and deference towards the figure of the teacher (Flowerdew and Miller, 1995, p.357). This contrasts with some views of Western educational cultures where 'teaching is process or discovery-oriented. Interaction, group work, and student-centredness are the order of the day' (Liu 1998, p.5). While there are undoubted contrasts between educational cultures between Western and Confucian cultures, this does not necessarily imply a link between the national culture and the culture of language education. Campbell and Yang maintain that English Language Teaching in China is characterized by the following assumptions:

1. Grammar analysis is crucial to foreign language learning.

2. Although texts books and classroom exercises are often tedious, there is no other way to learn a foreign language

3. The teacher should dominate the classroom while students listen passively and engage in exercises on command (1993, p.5).

However, this would also serve as a description of the way in which both authors of this paper learnt French at secondary school. De Jong also describes the anxiety of EU language teachers when confronted with the introduction of communicative language methodology in their classrooms:

> These anxieties derive in part from...the need to accept educational views and values which are felt to be contrary to cherished traditions or to which the teacher does not subscribe. In particular, the change of teacher-role to that of facilitator of pupil-centred learning poses problems for teachers in a culture of school environment which works predominantly on an authoritarian, 'top-down' model (1996, p. 81).

Thus there appears to be a range of sites of difference in educational cultures. First, difference in educational culture can be a function not just of a dislocation in space, but also a dislocation in time. Second, difference does not just exist *between* the homogenized regional blocks suggested by Hofstede (1991), it also exists *within* zones of ostensibly similar, 'individualist' or 'collectivist' beliefs and values (Littlewood, 2000). Third, difference in educational culture can be found between that of institutions of teacher education and that of schools. For example, the kind of process-based approach to language pedagogy learning that Liu (1998, p. 5) describes is much more common in the privileged language centres of well resourced universities than in secondary schools irrespective of their situation (Holliday, 1994, pp.110-124). And finally, learners in any case might not respond to a particular pedagogic approach in the way their teachers intend (Allwright, 1984; Canagarajah, 1999).

Inappropriate language pedagogy

Although it would appear that there are significant differences in educational cultures, this does not necessarily mean that methodologies cannot be transplanted across different cultures. Indeed, students might enroll on a language teacher education course precisely because they want to bring about a change in their own attitudes, beliefs and values; or in the way languages are learnt in their country of origin; or even in their own national culture itself. Some of these changes relate to issues of classroom practice, while others relate to aspects of the

institutional context. Most language teacher education programmes work towards initiating change in classroom practice when they work alongside student teachers evaluating approaches to second language acquisition and methodology. What these programmes do not always do is to focus on the implementation of institutional changes to which such evaluations may lead.

A major problem with second language acquisition and methodology courses is that they are often presented as having a universal application. That is to say, the processes of language teaching and learning can somehow take place independently of their cultural and institutional contexts. This is partly a reflection of the strong psycho-biological bias of much research which tends towards descriptions of language learners which display essentialist psychological characteristics (Grosse, 1998) rather than describing these characteristics in relation to material social conditions or educational context (Bax, 2003). In parallel with the natural sciences, implicit in the universalism of most research in second language acquisition is the idea that a finding in North America is a finding in Korea. This decontextualization is biased by the fact that a large amount of second language acquisition and methodological research is carried out within British, Australian or North American institutions. Teacher educators need to focus more on examining the ways in which context influences research settings.

> It should be the responsibility of theorists and researchers to establish the 'particularisability' of their work for teachers. The important question to ask is 'To what extent can this information be made usable for particular teachers?' (Clarke, 1994, p.20).

More theoretically, there is a need to abandon the model of language education in which teacher education institutions, primarily universities in the 'inner circle' of Britain, Australia and North America create theories and approaches which are used by teaching institutions in the 'outer circle' (Kachru, 1982). In this view, teachers are primarily consumers of research (Ellis, 1997, p.11) who fit into a hierarchy which privileges those who create or develop theories. This hierarchy makes it difficult to bring about change in the classroom because privileging

those in universities creates resistance in those who are not so privileged (Canagarajah; Holliday, 1994; Murphy, 1999).

> A better model of language education institutions would be to view them as conduits through which information about language learning, whether generated in the institutions themselves, their students or elsewhere, is made available for evaluation by student teachers (Clarke, 1994, p.20).

However, some of the results of conflict between educational cultures relate to institutional factors and cannot be addressed within the current framework of second language acquisition, methodology and classroom based components. For example, student teachers:

> …return home to face not only the problem of modifying their methods and techniques, but also the conflict between their newly acquired ideals and those still firmly followed by local professionals (Liu, 1998, p.7).

In this regard, it is necessary for language teacher educators to develop a clearer understanding of how changes in educational culture happen. They also need to provide student teachers with ways in which they can influence the contexts in which they work, so that they can bring about changes in the way that institutions conceive of teaching and learners conceive of learning.

The contextualization of language teacher education

In order to address some of the issues described above, language teacher education needs to move from its current singular and delocated approach to one which is pluralist and situated. This approach will be both derived from and embedded in multiple specific locations: its multiplicity will lend it a global aspect; its specificity will lend it a local aspect. This transformation can be achieved in three ways: by re-integrating the description of language and its pedagogy with its context of culture, by adjusting the balance of the voices of its participants, and by breaking down the divisions boundaries between subject areas.

Language and culture

It has long been a commonplace of methodology modules that language learners should be exposed to a variety of Englishes, and that language teaching materials should not be confined to stereotypical portraits of language learning situations. However, as we have seen, the relationship between language and culture has been realized less successfully in courses in language description and language acquisition. Even if the theories of language deployed in language description courses such as systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 1978; 1985; 1994) relate language to social context, the means by which these are taught can still be remarkably decontextualised even at postgraduate level. Many language description courses still tend to take decontextualised syntactic or phonological systems as the basis of their curriculum and refer to examples of language data which are not derived from their context of use. Typical of these courses - and in contradiction with the tenets of most modern language teaching pedagogy - is the exploration of restricted varieties of English such as Standard English or General American.

It is proposed that an appropriate, contextualized language teacher education program would start with authentic language data collected by students. In this respect, the approach to language description would move closer to the types of linguistic ethnography being advocated by Rampton and others (2003), but possibly have a more international orientation. Data might be derived from language classrooms or social situations in a variety of international environments. Encouragement will be given towards exploring situations of language use which involve 'non-native' speakers of English from diverse first language backgrounds conversing in English as a common currency (Alptekin, 2002). This would then provide the focus for unfolding the analytical frameworks which would be explored throughout the course. The process of analysis would then entail examining the way in

which formal aspects of the language - syntax, phonology or genre - relate to the social and cultural contexts in which the language is used. In particular, this would enable language teachers who work in a diversity of international contexts to understand specific ways in which English is used for communication in local contexts - be they pedagogic, institutional or entrepreneurial.

Voice

The dominant voice in language teacher education is still that of the academic or trainer who selects the educational knowledge and presents it to the participants on the programme. However, many of the participants on these programmes have long histories of language teaching in internationally diverse contexts. A contextualized language teacher education programme would also be multivocal. It would draw on the voices of the participants in order to use them as the starting point for the curriculum. This would then lead to a redistribution of power between academics/trainers and 'educators from various groups':

> …knowledge-making and knowledge-representing practices in collaborative groups are crucially important in creating dialogic possibilities in them. The question of who can claim the power to speak "research" where, and to whom has branched out into further questions as we realize that such power changes depending on the audiences and purposes of different kinds of research (Toohey and Waterstone, 2004, p. 307).

This redistribution of voice is similar to Basil Bernstein's notion of the 'framing' of the curriculum, where:

> …frame refers to the degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organization and pacing of knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship (1971, p. 206).

In drawing on the experience of its participants from the outset, an appropriate and contextualized language teacher education programme would actually address the unitary experience of the language classroom. Participants would be invited to construct and explore case studies of particular problems within the cultures of their own institutions of teaching and learning. Cases would then be analyzed drawing on research that had been

carried out from perspective of the various knowledges mentioned above. In this respect, the process of teacher education would also be transformed from being deductive to being inductive in as much as the experience of the participants would generate theory with critical reference to the established literature in the field. Thus, language teacher education would move towards more of a problem-solving approach in as much as participants would develop their knowledge and skills in an integrated way to complement their own experience of language classrooms.[1] In so doing, they might also model how schools (and ministries of education) might embrace any systemic change that might ensue. In this regard, language teacher education would strive to move beyond the concept of the reflective practitioner to that of the reflective educational institution.

Subject

Just as conventionally the voice of language teacher education flows from the academic researcher to the practising teacher*,* so its curriculum flows from a collection of specialist knowledges as if to a *tabula rasa.* As mentioned at the outset of the paper, the curriculum of language teacher education resembles other areas of education in as much as it is usually divided up into different specialist sub-areas. Core modules usually cover subject areas such as methodology, second language acquisition, language description and curriculum design. Optional modules often focus on materials design, young learners, the applications of IT or teacher education itself.

This division of the field of language teacher education into discrete subject areas draws on Bernstein's concept of the classification of the curriculum:

> Classification refers to the nature of the differentiation between contents. Where classification is strong, contents are well insulated from each other by strong boundaries. Where classification is weak, there is

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[1] The idea of a problem-solving language teacher education programme arose out of conversations between the authors and Michael Breen, to whom the authors are indebted.

reduced relationship between contents, for the boundaries between contents are weak or blurred. Classification

thus refers to the degree of boundary maintenance between contents (1971, p. 205).

It is curious that language teacher education programmes have not only divided language teaching into separate subject areas, but also that the boundaries between these subject areas have been relatively strongly maintained. Thus it appears that principle of the 'pedagogic device' is still geared towards the production, maintenance and reproduction of a 'collection code' (Bernstein, 1971; 1990; 2000) even within teacher education programmes.

However, the day-to-day contexts from which the subject areas of language pedagogy are derived and redeployed are strikingly unitary. It has been demonstrated that within the language classroom, teachers are reflexively engaged in the continuous monitoring and deployment of these different areas of knowledge and skills on a minute by minute, second by second basis (Woods, 1996). In this way, the production of different specialisms within language pedagogy and the maintenance of their boundaries do not arise from some incontestable version of 'common sense' (Geertz, 1983) but are institutional facts which are amenable to problematisation and negotiation. This institutional reconfiguration of a unitary experience of language teaching as a collection of specialist knowledges has one important consequence. It creates and maintains a state of ignorance on the part of the programme participants.

A problem-solving language teacher education programme would not only deploy power from lecturers and trainers to participants and teachers, it would also enable participants to re-appropriate institutionalized knowledges within the framework of their own classroom experience. The curriculum would then no longer be broken down into prefabricated subjects such as methodology, second language acquisition, language description and curriculum design, rather its would consist of case studies generated by participants. These would probably reflect some common practices such as 'intensive reading', 'feedback', 'groupwork', 'task design' with reference to specific classroom contexts. A portfolio of specific instances of these practices would then be examined

comparatively and critically drawing on an integrated literature from the specialist knowledges within the field of language teacher education mentioned above. Because the participants' experiences of language teaching and learning are derived from classrooms located in diverse cultural contexts, a problem solving approach would inevitably entail a critical examination of the compatibility of received theories of language teaching and learning with the cultural contexts in which they might be applied.

Conclusion

This approach to language teacher education, then, is an inductive process which takes the pedagogic experience and cultural context of its participants as its beginning rather than its end. It will achieve two things: the re-integration of the different specialist knowledges in their cultural context; and a multi-perspectival view of these knowledges from culturally diverse sites of engagement. In so doing, the focus of such a programme will move from the transmission of an ostensibly universalizable pedagogy of language teaching and learning to a realization of multivocal perspectives on the heterogeneity of cultural contexts in which participants are engaged on a day to day basis, both inside and outside their classrooms.

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